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MUSIC TO WORSHIP BY

OR

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC IN WORSHIP

TECHNIQUES OF RESEARCH

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The year is 1973. And because it is that year, many church goers are prepared to hear some unfamiliar sounds the moment they enter the sanctuary. Increasingly, the music they will worship by is completely foreign to that with which they were familiar even fifteen years ago. The advent of the sixties brought change of monumental proportions. Politics, technology, and life itself seemed to spring forth with new ideas, significant development and rapid--oh, so rapid--change. People tended to look to the church for stability. For the church was the fortress, the rock, the bastion of invincibility that didn't change or, at least, was not supposed to change. But the church did change. From Roman Catholic all the way across the spectrum to Pentecostal among Christian communities there came reexamination and experimentation. Ten years ago it started. Today there is so much material and such variation in style that "church music" no longer means chanting, organ, choir, congregational singing as it once did. Church music, or more definitively, contemporary music, means folk, jazz, dance set to music, religious drama encased in an oratorio, as well as the use of brass, string, percussion instruments, sometimes electronically produced, in addition to the familiar organ. That is why, in 1973, the worshipper does not always know what is in store when he goes to church.

Of one thing, however, he can be sure. He will not be asked to be a spectator, but a participant. In the review of a new rite, one church periodical notes:

> Worship as a community action is also emphasized in the new order of service. The role of spectator is never appropriate for any one who seeks to worship God. Accordingly, patterns of participation are

important in corporate worship.[1]

To be asked to participate, at the very least, or to be asked to assist in the formulation of new worship forms can be a threatening thing. Still, "any real sense of corporate celebration is denied when the only thing people are allowed to share is a pew."[2] Personal piety or individual religionism is no longer adequate in the Christian community. The worshipper who is threatened by the participatory worship experience must be ministered to. But this ought not mean retrenchment into a comfortable pew syndrome where nothing is asked of anybody. Again and again, laity and clergymen are being prodded with comments like: "We had better shape up or ship out if our business is communicating the Gospel and we refuse to update our program."[3]

Obviously, to update will be to consider musical forms. This is because music has been a major part of Christian worship as well as a pleasing form with which to communicate the Gospel. This must be done because music itself is a part of man's very nature. It has always occupied an important place in the daily living of primitive peoples. It was connected to events such as birth, puberty, marriage and other rites of passage, as well as religious ceremony.[4] The Greeks felt music was so important that they included it as a mandatory part of the educational process. To sing and to play an instrument was a requirement intended to put a person in tune with

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[1]Hans Boehringer, "Essay," Worship-Gram (St. Louis: Commission on Worship, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, January, 1971), p. 4.

[2]Clyde Reid and Jerry Kerns, Let It Happen (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 54.

[3]Ibid., p. 50.

[4]Herbert Weinstock, ed., "Music," Encyclopedia Americana, XIX, 626.

the rythm of life. In this way, a man would be able to achieve inner harmony of both body and soul. So taught Plato and other philosophers.[5] The western church for many centuries became the guardian and developer of various musical forms. During the Reformation a change came about. "The Protestant desire to make the congregation itself sing forced the musicians around Luther to strive for monumental simplicity and popular character. This led to the conversion of Gregorian hymns and secular songs, often with risqúe texts, into solemn, vigorous chorales."[6] This kind of congregational music update is in many ways comparable to that which the church is undergoing today. For, though it is appreciative of its heritage, it is interested now, more than ever, in contemporizing its method and mode of its musical aid to worship.

The forward momentum of allowing music in the church to change in order to match the tenor of the times has not gone without efforts to hold it back. One interesting example of this is the Apostolic Constitution, "On The Liturgy and On Promoting Gregorian Chant and Sacred Music," applauded by Pope Pius XI in 1928. A ponderous introductory statement sets the stage for part VII which particularly interests us here:

> As We have learnt that attempts are being made in different places to revive a kind of music which in no way befits the sacred offices, particularly on account of its immoderate use of instruments, We hereby declare that chant combined with orchestra is by no means considered by the Church as a more perfect form of music or more suited to sacred things. It is proper that the voice itself rather than musical instruments should be heard in the churches; that is the voice of the clergy, singers and congregation. It must not be thought that the Church is opposed to the advance of musical art in preferring the human voice to any instrument:

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[5] J. D. McCormick, "The Purposes of Education," lecture for Sociology of Education, United States Army Chaplain Center and School, Fort Hamilton, New York, October 23, 1973.

[6] Weinstock, "Music," Encyclopedia Americana, p. 630.

> but no instrument, however excellent and perfect, can surpass the human voice in expressing the feelings of the soul, most of all when it is used by the mind to offer prayer and praise to Almighty God.[7]

In spite of such a statement, the Roman Church itself has been at the forefront of today's musical revival within the churches. The renewal, it appears, cannot be held back.

There are several different forms which contain today's music for people to worship by. Perhaps the oldest of the young forms is folk music. Added to many of the nineteenth century pietistic hymns and other-worldly Negro Spirituals which lend themselves to use with guitar, is a whole new library of folk music, most of which has been written since 1960. The bibliography contains a listing of some of the resources, which do, it must be said, seem endless. The most popular example in a single folk hymn would be "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" by the Rev. Peter Scholtes.

> We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the Lord,
> We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the Lord,
> And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.
> And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
> Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.
>
> We will walk with each other, We will walk hand in hand,
> We will walk with each other, We will walk hand in hand,
> And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land. Refrain
>
> We will work with each other, We will work side by side,
> We will work with each other, We will work side by side,
> And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride. Refrain[8]

The final stanza is a doxology of praise to the Trinity. An interesting point here is that, though the idiom is new, the text reverts to

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[7]Fr. Andreas Card. Frühwirth, Apostolic Constitution, "Divini Cultus Sanctitatem," art. VII, quoted in Dom Gregory Sunol, Text Book of Gregorian Chant, trans. by G. M. Durnford (Tournai, Belgium: Society of St. John Evangelist), p. 211.

[8]Peter Scholtes, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love," Hymnal for Young Christians (Chicago: F. E. L. Publications, Ltd., 1970), pp. 74-75.

the tradition of the best hymnody of the Reformation where the composer's primary concern is the proclamation of the Word. In fact, the four characteristics which consistently appear in the great composers Schütz and Bach are present in "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

When texts of Luther, Schütz, and Bach are perused, four characteristics consistently appear. First of all, texts will usually be objective. . . . It's the saving activity of God which is a greater concern than the way we feel about "being saved." Secondly, the majority of texts will in some way implicitly or explicitly identify with a confession of the Trinity. A third trait most texts show is corporateness. That is, a sense of being a part of the Body of Christ, the Church, the Communion of Saints. . . . And the final characteristic found in many texts is a sense of responsibility toward one's fellowman, that is, neighbor, community, country, and world.[9]

Many of the folk songs have a ballad or story-telling style. They tend to approach their subjects in a more realistic or human way--a way with which people of the now generation will be able to identify. Take "The Rebel" by Richard K. Avery and Donald S. Marsh:

> He was a Rebel, yes, a Rebel! He changed water into wine,
> He was human and divine And he sold a revolutionary line.
> That was the trouble. That was the reason.
> Nearly everything he said Was bound to cost his head,
> For what he told the people sounded like treason.

Stanzas two to five pick up on points dealing with the life of Jesus, then in the final sixth stanza:

> He was a Rebel, yes, a Rebel! When his enemies had said:
> "We are safe now, he is dead." He rebelled against his death
> and rose instead. That's how he saves us. That's how he frees us
> Since he conquered death and sin We know his way will win--
> So let's join in his rebellion, this Jesus.[10]

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[9]Daniel G. Reuning, "Lutheran Musical Tradition in the Sacred Choral Works of Brahms," The Springfielder, XXXVI (September, 1972), 135.

[10]Richard K. Avery and Donald S. Marsh, "The Rebel," Songbook for Saints and Sinners (Carol Stream, Illinois: Agape, 1971), p. 53.

These are the types of songs that can easily be inserted during the course of worship on Sunday morning in almost any church or chapel setting. Many chaplains in the states and Europe are using this form. At Fort Wadsworth the Catholic congregation regularly sings folk hymns. At the same chapel, Protestant youth participated with folk music throughout the November 18, 1973, service. Regularly scheduled folk services can be found at several civilian churches on Staten Island alone.

Another way to use folk songs is to add to their existing content. For example, in the song, "Blowing In the Wind," the three stanzas are filled with questions that are noted in the refrain's "The answer my friend is blowing in the wind." A fourth verse can be added with very little difficulty. It might go something like this:

> How many questions will people ask before they find there's a way?
> How many hurts will one man endure before he'll listen and see?
> How many times will you show the way before your life passes on?
> The answer my friend isn't blowing in the wind
> The answer is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Contemporary secular songs can also be used in worship with great effect. Sermons can build on them, scripture readings can point to them. "Born Free," "Sounds of Silence," "The Impossible Dream," "You'll Never Walk Alone," "Climb Every Mountain" are but a few.

Then there are the Rock Operas Godspell and Jesus Christ Superstar. These can be adapted for chapel use or individual selections may be drawn out for particular attention. The song "Day by Day" from Godspell is probably the most popular single song from both operas. Ironically, it is based on a statement by Sir Richard of Chichester way back in the twelfth century:

> Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ:
> for all the benefits Thou hast given me;
> for all the pains and insults Thou hast borne for me.

Most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know Thee more clearly,
may I love Thee more dearly,
may I follow Thee more nearly.[11]

One need only add "day by day" to the last half to come up with the lyrics to the song of the same name in Godspell. Here, again, is an example of how one can develop a tie between the old and the new.

Jazz is another musical form to worship by. Greater dexterity of instrumentalists is needed for jazz so it is not as widely used as the folk idiom. Though jazz in the church sounds very new, one church on Manhatten, St. Peter's, has had jazz vespers each Sunday evening for the past eight years. On the evening of November 11, 1973, a quartet led by Lee Pazet played for over an hour. During the sermon portion of the service he was called on to share his concept of the music he was playing. He felt that his thought waves were musical rather than verbal. He stated his philosophy in this way:

> I want to try to make peaceful sounds, to try to express myself and peacefulness and beauty in my art. What I'm trying to do is to bring music into church because its spiritual, an ethereal reality. Music is powerful. I can feel music--not see it. People say they don't believe in God because they can't see him. I can't see music either, but it is real and I believe in it.[12]

It appeared that of the approximately seventy-five people present that evening, half of that congregation, extremely diverse in age and dress, were there because of its special appeal.

Another musical form might be termed, "The Dramatic Musical." Al

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[11]Sir Richard of Chichester, quoted on mimeographed sheet from Chaplain's Training Conference, Stuttgart, Germany, 1972.

[12]Lee Pazet, "My Philosophy on Jazz in the Church," meditation delivered at St. Peter's Church in New York City, November 11, 1973.

Carmines, pastor of Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, New York City, is a prolific writer of modern church music. A recently completed run of his new work, Religion, points out the effectiveness of the drama-musical approach. The scene is a Shaker meeting house. A chorus of eighty costumed "Shakers" sing the choruses between scenes in which members of the chorus take part. Though the setting comes from the mid-1800's, the message of the opening song, "I Believe in a New World," is contemporary. With like currency, the scenes of heaven and hell explode commonly held religious myths. The message continues to come forth in authentic clarity. Seeing this oratorio, one could well agree with Gilbert Chase's comment in America's Music that "in warring against the flesh and the devil, the Shakers found a perpetual source of excitement and of realistic ritual: . . . As 'Old Ugly' was driven away, the victory of the faithful might be celebrated with a song."[13]

The length and the number of participants needed for this type of work make it somewhat impractical for the average chapel's use. However, there are several complete musical programs in the more straight folk idiom which are readily adaptible to a smaller congregation. An example is Good News, developed by the Southern Baptist Church and available through Broadman records. The evangelistic emphasis comes through the music as well as through the words. This was attested to by the choir of young people from a Florida congregation who toured Germany with this program in 1971 and were extremely well received, even by German congregations.

Liturgical dance is another form of contemporary worship. When the choreography is coupled with music, more senses are appealed to. Expressions

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[13]Gilbert Chase gives an amplified account of the chasing of the devil or "Old Ugly" as a part of the revival ritual in America's Music (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 225.

of confession and praise, repentance, and thanksgiving, petition and adoration are easily recognizable. Kathy Iverson, a physical education professor at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, dances in church. She says: "Dance can be either very involving or on the edge of life and meaning. I'd like to get both dance and worship in the center."[14] Charles Austin, who writes about Kathy Iverson in a recent article in In Step, said of her dance ensemble: "These obviously disciplined and trained dancers gave shape to the words of the Doxology and other hymns and scripture passages. Their movements had the polish and clarity of well rehearsed performers." He was so impressed with the way that the dance had enhanced the music that he went on to say: " . . . When we came to the line, 'Praise Him all creatures here below,' everyone in the room could have perceived the meaning without the words being spoken."[15]

Perhaps the secret in all of the innovative, new musical worship forms is this: be yourself; be real and alive and creative as sons of God; shake off your inhibitions; use all that he has given you to really make music unto the Lord. It takes work, hard work. Unless one is willing to invest that into the creativity of worship, he will have to be content with long sermons and traditional forms, obviously to the detriment of the worshippers.

One of the appeals of the new music we worship by is its seeming spontaneity. Herein lies a danger that must be pointed out:

> Spontaneity takes a great deal of practice. Spontaneity is an illusion. A great deal of exercise is required before an expression can appear spontaneous. For example, when a youngster is beginning a course in gymnastics, he is terrible (sic) awkward, but really very spontaneous.

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[14] Kathy Iverson expressing her enthusiasm for religious dance in In Step, IV (September/October, 1973), 1.

[15] Charles M. Austin, "Choreography in the Chancel," In Step, IV (September/October, 1973), 1.

> A veteran gymnast, on the other hand, appears to be completely spontaneous, and yet his appearance of spontaneity is something that has taken years and years of practice. . . .
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> One frequently hears talk about the spontaneity of jazz. Well, the jazz musician, again, has a whole series of rehearsals and practice behind him before he can begin to take off in a manner that appears to be spontaneous. The same holds for the speaker.[16]

If one theme were to be the keynote of contemporary religious music it would be the theme of celebration. "There is a real need to plug into a source that furnishes us with a fresh approach to worship as corporate celebration."[17] "That purpose, like the instrument, is an old one: celebration. For when we play together what we are really doing is celebrating. We are making holy whoopee about what it means, as we see it, to be human, to be alive together in a world full of strangers impossible to understand."[18] Celebration. Celebrating God and life. Therein is contemporary music's central core.

Over the past years and recent weeks several opinions concerning contemporary music have been given to me. A few are here listed in order to take note of some of the varying views. Professor Hugo Gehrke, for many years professor of music at Concordia College, Oakland, California: "The continual repetition of the music bothers me, but I cannot deny the impact it is having." SP5 Tom Porter, former Roman Catholic seminarian and banjo player par exellance for field services in Vietnam: "For me, the strength and power of folk hymns are so meaningful. I find I can no longer worship in the old way." Mrs. Earl Stover, Protestant Youth Choir Director at the chapel at Fort Wadsworth after the November 18th service: "At first I was skeptical of this music, but now I like it very much. The young people are captured by it." Pastor Gensel

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[16] Clarence Joseph Rivers, Celebration (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), pp. 38-39.

[17] Reid and Kerns, Let It Happen, p. 50.

[18] Norman D. Dietz, "Sandra, Holy Shoopee and Me," Response, VIII, No. 4 (1967), 226.

of St. Peter's, Manhatten: "It really moves me." Many have also said: "Somehow, it just doesn't seem like church." Some others qualify comments with: "It's good for the youth."

Indeed, it would be a mistake to confine the advantages of the new music to just one age group alone. For it belongs to all. Its beauty, its positiveness, its celebration can do much to revitalize the church. Chaplains will do well to be quick to sieze the possibilities of today's music to worship by for all their congregants--children, youth and adults alike.

A man like Dag Hammarskjöld epitomizes the celebration of life with all its potential. In his diary he wrote in the best forward looking tradition: "To say Yes to life is at one and the same time to say Yes to oneself."[19] And from that celebration of life arises such a song as this:

And God said, Yes! Yes! Yes! Said yes to the world once more,
Said yes with a cosmic roar, Said open that other door,
Said Yes! Yes! Yes! man, Yes!

For God said, Yes! Yes! Yes! Let's splash the sky with light,
Let's float the earth in space, Let's dance away the night,
Said yes, yes, yes, man, yes!

And God said, Yes! Yes! Yes! Let's make a man who's free,
Creating life with love And ruling the earth with me.
Said yes, yes, yes, man, yes!

And God said, Yes! Yes! Yes! Let Jesus Christ be born!
Let's find him in the straw! Let's blast the shepherd's horn!
Said yes, yes, yes, son, yes!

And God said, Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes to his broken Son!
Yes to his open wound! Yes to the broken tomb!
Said yes, yes, yes, Son, yes!

And God said, Yes! Yes! Yes! We'll leap the swirling sky!
We'll leap the hungry grave! We'll never stop to die
Said yes, yes, yes, man, yes!

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[19] Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings, with a Forward by W. H. Auden (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1964), p. 92.

> And God says, Yes! Yes! Yes! Says yes to that other door!
> Says yes when men say no! Says yes with a cosmic roar!
> Says yes, yes, yes, with me![20]

That song receives another exclamation mark from Hammarskjöld:

> You dare your Yes--and experience a meaning.
> You repeat your Yes--and all things acquire a meaning.
> When everything has a meaning, how can you live anything but a YES.[21]

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[20]Norman Habel and Richard Koehneke, "And God Said, Yes!" Hymns for Now II (St. Louis: Board of Youth Ministry, Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1969), p. 22.

[21]Hammarskjöld, Markings, p. 125.

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